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**Indigenous people:
Partnership for action and dignity**

A just world for indigenous people



The term indigenous people has no universal, standard or fixed definition, but can be used to describe any ethnic group who inhabit the geographic region with which they have a historical connection. From a sociopolitical role perspective, indigenous people can be defined as: 'a politically underprivileged group, who share a similar ethnic identity different to the nation in power, and who have been an ethnic entity in the locality before the present ruling nation took over power' (Greller, 1997).

We are all one in union with Christ Jesus ... [we] are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.' (Galatians 3:28–29)

Living with dignity is a basic requirement for all human beings regardless of their ethnicity, language, religion, race or origin.

It has been estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people living in more than seventy countries worldwide. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that indigenous people in many places remain among the poorest and most marginalised. They face difficulties that include displacement, loss of control over ancestral land, abject poverty and lack of basic human needs and social services, especially health care and education. Most indigenous people live under oppressive and deplorable conditions and yet are striving to provide solutions to crucial world problems such as climate change and the erosion of biocultural diversity. The church must continue the struggle to promote the rights of indigenous peoples and advocate strongly for their full and effective participation in development processes at all levels.

The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2005–2015) was adopted at the 59th session of the General Assembly (Resolution 59/174) on 20 December 2004. Subsequently, the Program of Action for the Second Decade was adopted at the 60th session of the General Assembly (Resolution 60/506) on 29 November 2005. The theme for the Program of Action is 'Partnership for Action and Dignity'. This declaration represents the minimum standards of struggle for survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous people.

Much remains to be done to alleviate poverty faced by indigenous people, to protect them from massive violations of human rights and to safeguard them from discrimination. It is also observed that the development programs often ignore the needs of these communities and their traditional knowledge.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is commemorated each year on 9 August in recognition of the first United Nations Working Group meeting on indigenous populations in 1982 held in Geneva. Some changes can be identified since then. Over the last two decades, the situation of indigenous peoples has gained visibility in the national and international arena. The United Nations has provided a home for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in the UN system. A special rapporteur on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people has been appointed. The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been endorsed by the Human Rights Council.

We see international organisations, governments, indigenous organisations, churches and civil society organisations engaged in pursuing the objectives of the Second Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Churches should be more active and influential by planning awareness-raising activities at national and local levels, and by adopting specific policies on indigenous issues and organising capacity-building activities. The challenges faced by indigenous people are complex and there are no simple blueprints in the Bible. However there is wisdom for those who want to seek it. We all need to seek that wisdom for ourselves and for the people who have the power to influence the situation positively and constructively.

Let us pay tribute to the indigenous peoples of the world who relentlessly pursue the struggle for their rights and dignity and work to make their visions a reality.

Let us all work together to make the theme of the second World's Indigenous Decade—'Partnership for Action and Dignity'—a true possibility.

Let mutual love continue.

Let mutual hospitality flourish through our responsible care of, and for all God's people.

—Prawate Khid-arn

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In This Issue

CCA in Focus



People's theology	4
Indigenous people of Thailand	8
Stories of indigenous women	10
8th ICCAP conference on HIV/AIDS	12
Life-giving civilisation	14
CCA visit to Sri Lanka	16
AMCU seminar in Kuala Lumpur	18
CCA-UNESCAP addresses HIV/AIDS	20

Asia Scene	22
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The Korean hostage crises



Indigenous people:
Partnership for action and dignity

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Agreement on evangelisation



Reflections	25
Mission and witness	27
Common prayer	

Newsbrieft	28
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People's theology

Indigenous people call for a paradigm shift in doing Asian theology

Wati Longchar
delves into the need
for doing theology
from the eyes of
indigenous people of
the land

Indigenous people are known by different terms, such as tribals, adivasi, ethnic minorities, natives, aborigines. In many countries they are the 'first people' of the land but constitute always a minority group. Socially, they are the most exploited and divided. Their history is one of defeat, suffering and oppression. They have endured discrimination, genocide, exploitation and alienation for ages. As a result of slavery and subjugation, they have lost confidence and developed a sense of inferiority. The dominant communities tend to look down upon indigenous people as backward, primitive and uncivilised, living in the hills and forests. The terms 'tribal' and 'indigenous' in some contexts carry a pejorative and derogatory meaning. In a caste-dominated society such as India, indigenous people like myself suffer the stigma of being considered 'untouchables'. Within nation-states, indigenous people are not only economically marginalised but also politically disenfranchised, making them the most powerless people of society. Oppression, militarisation

and all forms of ethnocide are part of their everyday life. Violence, conflicts and killings have become common realities and clashes within and outside communities are on the rise.

In recent years, a peculiar form of alienation, injustice and humiliation has been enforced through globalisation. Thus, indigenous people face further marginalisation and grave threats to their right to life. One of the most common forms of injustice they face is displacement. In different parts of the world they have become the victims of big reservoirs, mega-projects, wildlife sanctuaries, parks, mines and industries. They are forcefully evicted from their ancestral lands, abode to the various spirits they worship, often without appropriate compensation. They are simply ignored and silenced—all in the name of development.

The rights of indigenous people are often violated. When displaced, they are forced to move to the cities and slums in abject poverty and misery. When the dominant majorities do not listen to their cries and do not recognise their rights, some indigenous people take up armed struggles. Instead of recognising this as a justice issue governments try to suppress the movements by military power, burning villages and killing innocent people. How does the ecumenical movement respond to the cries of these indigenous people and find a solution to their issues?



Christianity and indigenous people

Majority of Christians in Asia are indigenous people who were converted to Christianity in search of liberation and social justice. However the theologies came from outside and did not address the needs and problems of local indigenous people.

The contribution of missionaries in social transformation of indigenous communities is to be acknowledged with great respect. The Christian missionaries were the first people to work for their liberation. They transformed the society by abolishing such evil practices as slavery, headhunting and lavish feasting. Many modern institutions were first introduced by the mission-

aries e.g. the first school, the first hospital and the first printing press. However, they often considered themselves 'superior' to indigenous people and their traditional religions and cultures. They came with a strong view to conquer the 'other world' by the Christian faith. Conversion was understood in terms of replacement of the old ways of life and implied rejection of traditional cultures and value systems.

During the missionary era, native culture and traditions were ignored as a valuable resource for doing theology. Christians who participated in traditional festivals were not accepted by the church. Drums, traditional songs, dances and values were condemned as evil and were prohibited. Theology was alien to its people spoken in an alien language and with alien ideas. Thus, the church and its theology were strangers to people in the society.

In time new theological movements began to take shape along with the national movements in Asia but they could not spread their roots among the indigenous communities. Many theologians were critical of the missionaries during the independence movement. They began to use the concepts, doctrines and symbols of other religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, in doing theology. They tried to work out theological hermeneutics by using philosophical thought patterns of these religions. With this practice theological language became highly abstract. Unfortunately, like the other dominant theological reflections in the West, such an approach made intellectual exercises unidentifiable with the real-life situations of people. It promoted a notion among Asian Christian thinkers that indigenous people's spirituality was not philosophically deep enough to articulate theology. These indigenous people's spirituality was undermined and discarded. People understood indigenous culture and beliefs simply from the traditional mission perspective as a dark world to be conquered. They could not imagine that the cultural values and spirituality of indigenous people also can enrich the understanding of Christian faith in the cultural settings of the people. Such a one-sided theological paradigm again alienated indigenous people from their own religion.

After the departure of the missionaries or even in their presence, three-self-movements were organised by many churches in Asia, such as self-government, self-supporting and self-propagating movements. The contribution of

Chinese churches remained significant in these movements. Today we can proudly say that many churches were able to stand on their own in terms of support and mission. However, one important aspect was left out—'self-theologising'. This was never considered an important component for the self-identity of the church until recently.

Theology and culture

Christian theology as a faith experience cannot exist without reflecting on the cries, stories, desires and struggles of the people. The history of human life has many dimensions and they are all resources for doing theology. I would like to elaborate on just one dimension—culture. While the gospel frees people from bondage, it is culture that sustains and nourishes their identity. The work of God is imminent in all lands and people despite the sometimes ambiguous nature and disparities of culture. There are no people without God and every culture possesses some form of divine manifestation which makes it one of the most important resources for doing theology.

Like other communities, the indigenous people uphold a very distinctive cultural value system. Considering that culture has both liberating and oppressive elements the task of theology is to challenge and transform the oppressive elements, and recover and integrate the affirming values into our lives. Indigenous worldviews differ from one community to another. However, there are commonalities:





- Land is the basis of human selfhood and realities are perceived from creation perspectives.
- There is no clear distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion.
- Self of the ‘supreme being’ is seen in creation.
- Earth is the focal point of reference and all religious activities are centered in the soil, which makes earth sacred and central to life.
- Relationship between individuals is more important than performance of tasks.
- Adaptation to the environment is essential. The earth is sacred and is our mother. So how can we sell and exploit our mother!
- It is highly group-oriented.

Indigenous people give more priority to community and preservation of land and space. Their values are not mere abstract concepts, but a significant part of their life and existence. In spite of Christianisation and modernisation such value systems continue to liberate, sustain and nourish life. These cultural resources can empower and transform people in their historical struggle for social, political and economic justice by creatively co-relating with the gospel. Unfortunately indigenous scholars did not give sufficient attention to cultural values in doing contextual theologies. This neglect has been one of the most serious obstacles for the churches in their attempt to be truly rooted in the land with its people. As a result theology became a stranger among indigenous people.

Challenges of doing theology in Asia

The emerging theology of indigenous people is ‘indigenous theology’. It is a theology born out of the experiences of injustice and exploitation. It attempts to express Christian faith in socio-cultural, religious, traditional and liturgical terms through thought patterns of the people. Indigenous theology is a resistance to affirm justice, identity, dignity and wholeness of the land and its inhabitants. The experiences of oppression, hardship, traditional stories, myths, symbols, dances and songs and their connections with the land and the environment are vital resources for doing theology.

Indigenous people’s theology is contextual and stems from ‘below’ and of the ‘underside of history’. It aims to liberate people from inferiority, oppression and discrimination. It attempts to rediscover the liberating motifs in their cultures and religion by reinterpreting the Bible and Christian traditions from the perspective of the people. Therefore the focus and goal of indigenous theology should be liberation and transformation. The aim should be to restore self-identity and dignity by creatively engaging with the gospel and culture in its struggle for justice. When striving for liberation, transformation and creative participation in the wider society, indigenous people work for both the oppressor and the oppressed. It is, therefore a theology that includes liberation of the whole humanity and God’s creation in its agenda.

Methodologically what makes its indigenous theology unique from other theologies such as *Dalit* or *Minjung* is their quest for liberation from a perspective of land. It is land that sustains and nourishes people and gives them a sense of identity. The history, culture, religion, spirituality and the ‘sacred power’ of indigenous people cannot be conceived without the concept of land or space. The land and its inhabitants are two aspects of one reality and human liberation will be void and empty without affirming the integrity of the land and its resources. A liberation without land leads to slavery and destruction. Therefore the resources of the land to sustain and nourish all beings give indigenous people a sense of identity and selfhood and cannot be seen as merely a justice issue on its own.

Land has an immense importance in the foundation of history, existence and identity of indigenous people. Poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict and identity problems cannot be understood or solved without relating to the in-

tegrity of creation and the land. Since justice to creation is central to human dignity and fullness of life, doing justice to the 'land' is the starting point of the indigenous people's theology and their search for liberation. Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation foster love, nurturing, care and acceptance. This methodological priority of justice to the land is essential not only because of its 'earth-centred' worldview and tradition, but because of our contemporary ecological crisis, misuse of resources, market culture, war for oil and survival crisis.

As a theology of resistance, it involves risking life for the sake of Christ. Indigenous people's theology continues to struggle for reconstructing a life-centered theology based on the Jesus' movement in Galilee. This was a movement against Pax Romana. Jesus was crucified by the power of the Roman Empire when his disciples became martyrs and his community of faith was persecuted. Jesus' movement was against the power of destruction and death and was a hope of the resurrection of all living beings. In the struggle against the power of the Roman Empire, Jesus stood with the people who were suffering and struggling. This movement became the basis and hope for indigenous people's struggle for life. Discipleship meant following Jesus in his efforts to bring an end to all hegemonic powers that challenge the sovereignty of God over people and the earth. The story of the epiphany is the model for indigenous people's theology in age of power and greed of the market today.

Another example could be the Magi from the East who went to meet the child Jesus in the manger and were asked to go back to the empire and report the whereabouts of the baby. This baby's presence was an alarm to the emperor and an imminent threat to his power. However, instead of meeting the imperial obligation, the Magi left through a different route, which did not lead to the power and empire, but a way that protects the life and hope for the marginalized. Meeting and encountering the Divine signifies a change of route and shows that old routes towards power are not the way to establish love and righteousness.

Discourse on indigenous people's theology can make a difference in our times by turning and rerouting towards the Jesus of Galilee movement. In this movement, we see a decisive reversal from power and money to the people in pain, from ruler to the ruled and from oppressor to the oppressed. It was a life-centered movement

against the power of destruction and death. Jesus stood for a different value system based on peace, love, service and liberation of the poor and the earth and resisted the power of sword and mammon. Jesus became the voice of the oppressed and voiceless. His paradigm shift in theology was life-centered. This option, for protection of life as the focus of indigenous people's theology, required sacrifice and a radical departure from power.

Indigenous people hold a life-centered spirituality an ethic of responsibility, and respect for all God's creation. This understanding, when interpreted with sound biblical exegesis and theological implication, can provide a powerful antidote to the exploitative dominance that has characterised many attitudes in the world. Further, the strong sense of community and life-rooted worldview is a wonderful asset to be shared with postmodern Westernised, individualised world of people who have lost a sense of identity and life. In the world of rationalisation, mechanisation, objectification, and fragmentation, the vision of interrelatedness of all realities in indigenous traditions would help us to do theology in a new way, that is, to remodel it from the perspective of 'space' and 'interdependencies'.

Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation foster love, nurturing, care and acceptance.



To be or not to be

Obtaining citizenship for indigenous people of Thailand

People living in one land for generations before the time of states and nations, having specific cultures, traditions and wisdoms are called indigenous or native people. However in Thailand indigenous identity is not recognised. These people are classified and defined by different government offices as 'tribal people' or 'highlanders'. The term 'tribal people' implies ethnic minority groups and those living in Thailand for a long time, however their definition according to the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior is not specific. The term 'highlanders' also means ethnic

minorities who are living in the highland remote areas of the north of Thailand with their own languages, values, beliefs, cultures and traditions different from that of lowland people. There are nine major groups of highlander people in Thailand, including the *Karen* tribe according to the Public Welfare Office.

Indigenous people might be known as tribal people, an ethnic minority or highlander, but becoming a 'Thai citizen' is not easy for them. Like everyone else they are eligible to have a national legal status and to be recognised with dignity. As native people living in politically divided border areas, many do not have legal stats. Yet the Thai government asks them for identification papers such as birth certificates, house registration and ID cards to be eligible for Thai citizenship. Failure to produce these documents means they are 'nationality less' people (*de facto*). Another reason for their vulnerable situation is them being confused as 'ethnic minorities' or 'refugees' by government officials. Due to ethnic cleansing in Myanmar a great number of displaced people and refugees from these communities cross the border into Thailand. Their legal status becomes complicated increasing the problems for indigenous people.

The Department of Administration Ministry has recently devised a system to identify the 'non Thai' people in the country. On the basis of personal identity status they are divided into several groups and each has an identity card with a different colour. It is therefore interesting to see how indigenous people have sometimes more than one identity card. For highlanders it's a blue card, Myanmar displaced people a pink card, for illegal migrant from Myanmar an orange card, for highlander census - green coloured card with a red rim and for migrant workers a document. Many indigenous people do not hold any identification document so they get declared as people with no legal status. This complex situation has continued for the past forty years in Thailand. The government's failure to establish a personal legal status for indigenous people has resulted into the denial of their basic human rights. The



fact that they were born and bred on Thai soil and have been living here for generations holds no significance in the legal system of the country. The process of change is slow. Working and challenging the legal system in Thailand is a demanding task. Nevertheless this needs to be done to ensure the rights of indigenous people.

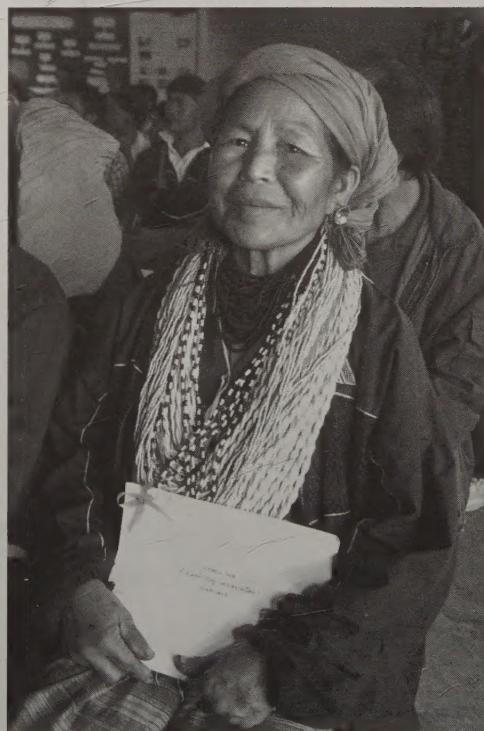
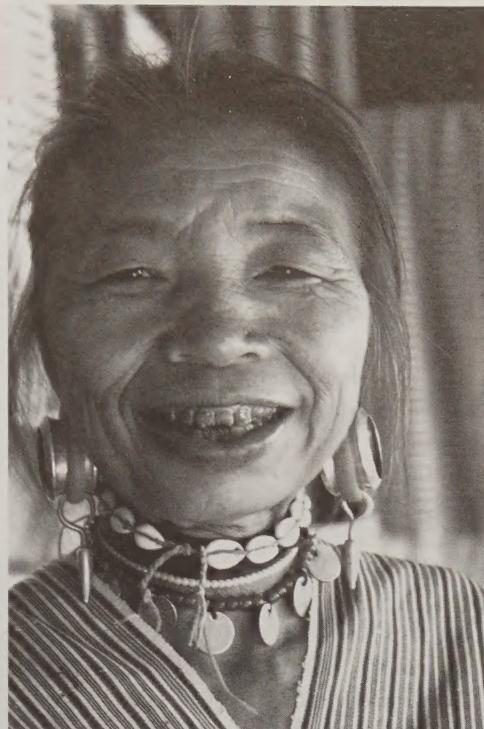
This makes the legal status issue one of the major challenges the churches are faced with in Thailand. For more than ten years the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) has been working on the personal legal status issue through the Ministry of Social Development and Service Unit (SDSU) to educate indigenous people about their rights and help them to apply for Thai citizenship when they are eligible. In this process the most difficult part of the work is to find documentation to apply for Thai citizenship. According to legal argument no matter if they were born or raised in Thailand, if they could not show a document such as a birth certificate or census documents, they will not be eligible for equal citizenship status.

Many indigenous people face insecurity and discrimination due to this situation. They feel marginalised and cut off from the national mainstream. This restricts them from participating, like other fellow citizens, in important national tasks and pushes them to the edges of society where they feel isolated and deprived of their basic rights. At times it is beyond the church's capacity to make a change in the government's policy on personal legal status. However to challenge this CCT-SDSU has joined hands with other NGOs to demand change in the discriminatory laws and regulations of the government.

As the body of Christ, we need to join hands with others to resist injustice faced by the indigenous people. We need to play a role in promoting and supporting their rights and dignity deserve as God's people. May they live a life where they are acknowledged with all their strengths and abilities and enjoy equal status like everyone else.

—Janejinda Pawadee

Indigenous people might be known as tribal people, an ethnic minority or highlander, but becoming a 'Thai citizen' is not easy for them.



Stories of inspiration

Asian indigenous women weaving patches of justpeace

Indigenous women are implementing praxis oriented theologies of life with simple but crucial questions.

Indigenous women are the worst victims of several forms of violence in Asia, however they continue weaving patches of justpeace to build communities of peace for all. They also weave 'indigenous feminist theology of life' through dialogue and sharing. The updates from the participants of the subregional Indigenous Women's Alternative Leadership Training (IWALT) bear testimony to this fact.

IWALT in Asia is a three-year project of CCA (2005–2008) in partnership with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Sisters Network aiming to nurture, enhance and strengthen the sustainable knowledge and skills of indigenous women. As EGY is preparing for the follow up regional gathering of IWALT in Myanmar in November 2007, here we share some stories from follow-up activity reports of IWALT subregional participants about transforming activities of local communities as well as the challenges they are faced with.

Patch working transformation

Deaconess Rakhi Drong from Garo tribe in Bangladesh was one of the most quiet and shy participants of the subregional IWALT meeting in Thailand 2006. Rakhi organised two training programs in villages in partnership with Indigen-

ous Women's Development Society in Bangladesh. She is now one of the emerging ecumenical indigenous woman leaders and says proudly in her follow up report, 'I have overcome my shyness. So what if I cannot speak English. IWALT subregional training program provided me with accompanying sisters who helped me to translate, communicate and express myself. See! Now I can share and nurture the skills of other indigenous women at the grassroots level in the villages of Bangladesh.'

The methodology of providing accompanying sisters to the participants of IWALT was the major highlight of EGY in enabling grassroots women leaders to participate in the program effectively and communicate with ease.

Thailand subregional participants in partnership with Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) organised a training workshop for seventy indigenous women along with ten men participants. Susila Tanoy, secretary of CCT says, 'It was during the harvest time we organised the training. Men church leaders cooked food so that the women could participate.' These may be small drops of gender justice, but with the capacity to make a huge ocean of change and awareness.

Demak, a doctor from Batak tribe in Indonesia writes, 'My activity follow up report may not look perfect to you as I am not a theologian. But I have tried my best. Next time it will be better. The hospitals I work for have patients, ninety percent of which are poor and belong to indigenous communities. They often cannot pay for special treatment. And sometimes even hospital workers cannot help even if they want to as we also do not get enough salary. It bothers me to see people suffering, especially children. But I joke with patients and tell them the hospital slogan, 'Never mind your salary—it is going to be big in heaven. But I wonder if we can ever make a heaven on earth...' It is in such context that we need to reaffirm continuously the strength of our indigenous sisters. IWALT has aimed to do that. Demak has already raised an important theological question. Like her, indigenous women are implementing praxis oriented theologies of



Rakhi Drong (on the right) in IWALT Training for Indigenous women in Bangladesh.

life with simple but crucial questions. Such grassroots women's theology may not be found in volumes in libraries as their contributions are often undermined by mainstream society and even by the Asian church. However their contribution shows the strength and capabilities of these women in influencing their communities.

Challenges for Asian ecumenical movement

Moumita Biswas, joint executive secretary of EGY-women, attended a preparatory meeting for the regional IWALT meeting in Myanmar 5–9 August 2007. The regional IWALT meeting will be taking place in November 2007. There she had an opportunity to hear the stories of indigenous women. These are the stories that often remain unheard and need to be revealed as they raise crucial questions and pose challenges to the Asian ecumenical movement.

Two indigenous women from Kachin and Karen tribes shared their experience on how jade fields are being depleted by rich Chinese businessmen in Myanmar. The deforestation increases the suffering and agony of indigenous women more than ever. There are not enough schools for children in Wa tribe villages in Myanmar. Due to extreme poverty Wa families, including children, are forced to engage in illegal trafficking of opium for survival. And many Wa youth are dying due to the opium addiction.

The sharing and discussions with indigenous women in Myanmar revealed that exploitation and sexual abuse of teenage indigenous students was committed by a foreign missionary in the community. In this critical situation the Myanmar Council of Churches played a vital role in restoring justice. The Women's Desk Legal Aid program of the church helped the indigenous girl victims in seeking justice. However this makes us interrogate the dynamics and objectives of mission and evangelism in today's context, especially evangelisation activities carried out by foreign missionaries in indigenous communities in Asia. Do we really need foreign missionaries to convert indigenous people in Asia? How can our mission paradigms uphold the transforming influence of the indigenous Asian Jesus—the friend and supporter of the poor and destitute women and children—to build communities of peace in Asia? We need to examine deeply how far Asian churches and ecumenical partners have been able to promote gender justice and advocacy to end sexual harassment.



Weaving patches of justpeace

Follow-up activity reports of the participants from Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia and India reveal that despite being the worst victims of violence, Asian indigenous women do have the power to weave patches of justpeace. They resist in their own contexts and challenge the threads of injustice around them.

Our responsibilities

It is our collective responsibility to promote gender justice to overcome the sufferings of Asian women and children especially those from vulnerable indigenous communities. CCA-EGY as a facilitating body invites churches, member councils and ecumenical partners to create ripples of transformation by expressing solidarity and supporting the activities of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance for Conflict Transformation to Overcome Violence against Women in Asia. This will be a inter cluster project initiated by CCA-EGY and JID from 2008. The project will focus on'Water Wars and their impact on Asian Women' and 'Right to life and dignity of women migrant workers'.

—Moumita Biswas



Have we kept the promise?

Interfaith meeting addresses the challenge of HIV/AIDS

As a prelude to the Eighth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, an International Interfaith Pre-conference on HIV/AIDS was organised by the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA), the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches on 17–19 August 2007, also in Colombo, on the theme 'Response of Faith Communities to HIV and AIDS—Have We Kept the Promise?' The meeting was hosted by the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka.

In his opening statement, Dr Prawate Khidarn, CCA's general secretary said, 'This conference becomes yet another milestone for faith-based communities. It has opened up space for wider interfaith cooperation among Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu faiths to exchange ideas and experiences on the very sensitive and significant issue.'

There are now 8.63 million people living with HIV in Asia, including 960,000 newly infected people. Faith-based communities are providing a huge share of the services in response to HIV and AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a critical test

of our faith and commitment to sustainable community and fullness of life. The causes of HIV/AIDS are rooted not merely in health and physical spheres, but also in lifestyles, social perspectives and attitudes and individual behaviour practices. As faith-based communities we are challenged by our faith and divine teaching to speak out against stigma and discrimination and to protect the dignity and human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS.

In its final statement, the pre-conference said, 'We recognise that the values of our religions compel us to respond to the human suffering caused by HIV and AIDS in our communities. These values also provide a unique and distinctive contribution to the overall response to the AIDS pandemic.'

'Recognising the dignity, sacredness, rights and responsibilities of individuals and communities we are committed to work to overcome HIV in an inclusive manner, mobilising the human, spiritual, institutional and financial resources that our faith communities possess.'

'We dedicate ourselves to face the reality of HIV in our societies, to assess the needs in our communities and to prioritise our responses, considering our strengths and comparative advantages. We will also seek to identify and overcome our weaknesses, building on our achievements to make our communities competent in dealing with HIV and AIDS. To be accountable to the people we serve and the wider society, we will also ensure assessment of our progress and the impact we have in our own contexts.'

'In many ways, religious organisations have already been active in addressing all aspects of HIV and AIDS from raising awareness to providing treatment, care and support to those affected. But we know there is much more we must do, and we are committed to ensure that the tremen-

people of different
faiths at pre ICAAP
conference



dous social assets and competencies of our faith communities are energised to engage religious leaders, build partnerships and mobilise communities.'

Engaging Leadership

'We believe that religious leaders can and must play a constructive role in response to HIV/AIDS. We are committed to educating and mobilising the leaders to advocate, educate and lead by example in their respective faith communities.'

'We will develop tools to train the leadership so that they can be effective public voices for raising awareness and reducing the stigma and discrimination so often associated with HIV and AIDS.'

We will work to ensure that religious leaders at all levels are equipped to provide accurate, evidence-based information on preventing the spread of the virus, while at the same time focusing on the values and teachings in our faith traditions that also contribute to reducing HIV infections.'

Building Partnerships

'The enormity of the challenge requires partnerships of unprecedented range and scope. We as faith communities are resolved to develop new partnerships and to strengthen existing ones with other sectors.

'We are committed to work in solidarity with people living with HIV and AIDS. We acknowledge that we have not done enough in this area, and have at times contributed to their sense of exclusion and stigmatisation. We will work to build trust and to create inter-faith partnerships with positive networks at country, regional and local levels and encourage positive networks within our own communities. We are convinced that by working together we can defeat stigma and discrimination and create inclusive communities.'

'We emphasise the special role that inter-faith cooperation has played in building bridges across faiths and in helping us to address the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS more effectively. We are committed to strengthening such partnerships based on mutual respect and focussed on our shared values of human dignity, compassion, and love.'

'We are committed to strengthen AINA as an effective interfaith network at the regional level, so that it can advocate for the role of faith-

based organisations, support national interfaith networks and help share information and coordinate our collective response to AIDS in Asia and the Pacific.

'We are also committed to expand our partnerships with governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and other key actors to ensure that our faith communities have the financial, human, and material resources we need to be successful in controlling the pandemic. We are ready to work together, but we urge these sectors to respect and support the unique values and approaches that we as religious communities bring, even as we commit to respect their unique roles.'

Mobilising Communities

'We believe that the response to the pandemic has to be centred in the community, and we commit to building caring, equitable communities that lead the way in supporting affected persons, encouraging openness, reducing stigma and discrimination, and addressing social inequities.

'We will utilise the structures of our faith communities—our places of worship, the educational and health facilities, our women's and youth organisations—to provide the full range of prevention, treatment, care and support services.

'We will work to incorporate HIV and AIDS information in appropriate ways into our worship rituals, our festivals, our religious education and training of future leaders.

'We will also engage our faith communities in holding our governments and other international actors accountable for the commitments they have made to provide increased resources and to work towards universal access to treatment, prevention, care and support services.

'In closing, we see this gathering as a starting point for closer cooperation in the future and are committed to carrying out follow up efforts in our countries and across the Asia-Pacific region. 'In all these commitments, we seek guidance and support from the divine spirit that animates us and is the source of our being, so that we may play our part in "keeping our promises" to overcome HIV and AIDS and bringing healing and hope to all humanity.'

—Geoff Alves

HIV/AIDS is a critical test of our faith and commitment to sustainable community and the fullness of life.

Life—giving civilisation

CCA-FMU staff at consultation on transforming theology and life-giving civilisation

In our quest for alternative theology, spirituality and mission for a life-giving civilisation and wider ecumenism in the twenty first century, do Asia and Africa have something to offer as better alternatives?

When the World Council of Churches and the Council for World Mission jointly organised the theological consultation on 'transforming theology and life giving civilisation', they believed that Africa and Asia could provide some alternatives.

The consultation was held on 12–17 August 2007 at the Hanmaum community in Chang Seong, Korea. This is a community that was born out of the movement of the farmers' struggle for social justice and democracy in Korea. Since its founding seventeen years ago, it has intentionally given up modern privileges associated with urban life in Korea in exchange for a more ecological lifestyle.

participants of
consultation on
'transforming
theology and life
giving civilisation' in
Korea.



Rev Nam Sang-Do

'Afro-Asian solidarity and cooperation is an important contribution to the search for a new paradigm of ecumenism in the twenty first century. The core of it is very well expressed in the subtitle of this consultation, As *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng* Meet Together" said the World Council of Churches general secretary Samuel Kobia in his message at the consultation. Unfortunately, these traditional concepts, values and practices have been slowly eroded by the impact of globalisation, materialism and individualism of modern living.

Japhet Ndhlovu expounded the logic of *ubuntu*, an African word which stands for the African cosmo-vision of life in community including the 'capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring'. Kim Yong Bock expounded the logic of *sangsaeng*, which is an ancient Korean concept of convivial living of all beings through a sharing community and economy that allows all to flourish together.

The six-day consultation included group discussions and a visit to historical places such as Hwang Ryong (the memorial of the Dong Hak peasant revolution), Baek Yang Sa (a historical Buddhist temple and an input from Venerable Beob-Seon), and Confucian school.



Another unique activity was the conversation with members of the Hanmaum community, which was a good example of the quest for life-giving civilisation. ‘To be more faithful to the way that Jesus lived, we need to change in the way we think and do things,’ said the Rev. Nam Sang-Do, builder of the clay houses and conference hall and founder of the Hanmaum community, which gave us a taste of ecological living during the consultation. This means transforming ourselves in the four aspects of culture—what we eat, where we live, what we wear, and what kind of education we have.

Although well equipped with internet facilities, the Hanmaum community intentionally strives for an alternative lifestyle as opposed to a petroleum-motivated consumer lifestyle. Living in clay houses (which are naturally cooler in summer and warmer in winter) is rooted in the belief that our body, having been taken from the earth, must engage with its origin.

To ensure healthy food, the Hanmaum community promotes organic farming. ‘True farming should not add anything to the soil for the earth has its own natural nutrients. Having the right kind of seed is ensured when farmers use the seeds that originate from their own soil rather than those from outside which are chemical-dependent and which promote monopoly of the food chain,’ Rev. Nam Sang-Do explained.

To promote alternative clothing, the community is also into organic production and dyeing of fabric. In terms of education, they have opened a kindergarten school that incorporates the philosophy of *hanmaum*, meaning one heart, starting with the very young.

The group of thirty-five younger theologians, mostly from Africa and Asia and a few from the Caribbean and Latin America, was challenged to think of concepts, values or philosophies in their own places that are similar to *ubuntu* and *sangsaeng*, and to identify communities such as Hanmaum that model alternative ways of living, in order to draw from them alternative theologies that are transforming and civilisations that are life-giving.

‘Today we are faced with life-killing civilisation, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of empire, and the escalation of religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilisation, which affirms relationships, coexistence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice. This quest



Hope S. Antone and Rev Nam Sang-Do



The conference hall made of clay

finds meaning in *ubuntu* and *sangsaeng*.’ This was affirmed in the final statement prepared by the participants of the consultation.

—Hope S. Antone

Works of faith

CCA team visits Sri Lanka to be more closer to its churches



Beautiful Sri Lanka

New house at Kahawa village



Recently a team from CCA visited Sri Lanka. Our first impression on the way from the airport was the high degree of security in the capital, Colombo. Soldiers lined the roads and we were continually pulled over at checkpoints. When we tried to go for a walk by the sea, we were stopped by a soldier who told us this was forbidden. The second impression was how beautiful a country Sri Lanka is. Waves crash on to the sand beneath waving palm trees and in the hills tea bushes and cinnamon trees grow abundantly. Thirdly, the faith of Sri Lankans is obvious. A friend told us that there were five major religions in the country. ‘Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity—and cricket!’

We headed south towards Galle, to see areas devastated by the tsunami in December 2004. We were able to visit two villages built by people who had lost their homes in that disaster. Many of these people were fisherfolk. The government had given them money to buy land inland and the Baptist Sangamaya (Baptist Union) had assisted with the building of new two- and three-bedroom houses.

Another purpose of our visit was to attend the International Interfaith Pre-conference on HIV/AIDS. A report of this conference appears elsewhere in this issue.

We also found time to visit the Sri Lankan member council and churches of CCA. Sri Lanka holds a special place in the Asian ecumenical movement as it was a Sri Lankan, Rev. Dr D.T. Niles, who, fifty years ago, was one of the prime movers in the establishment of what was to become the Christian Conference of Asia, and was its first general secretary.

The current general secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris, spoke to us about the civil war, that continues to go ‘from bad to worse’ as the headline of the article in the last issue of CCA News puts it. The temptation for outsiders is to want to solve the problem, but Jayasiri reminded us that true peace will only be realisable if it comes from the Sri Lankan people themselves.

We called on the Anglican Bishop of Colombo, Rt Rev. Duleep de Chickera, a good friend of the ecumenical movement, who reminded us that CCA needs to be better known at the church level. This can be done of course by inviting people to CCA activities, but in addition CCA needs to come to the people. We were fortunate to worship at an Anglican church, St Michael's and All Angels in Polwatte, which has services in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

We also managed to visit three Baptist churches. The Baptists arrived in Sri Lanka in 1812. At the Grandpass church in a very poor area, English classes and sewing programs are used mainly by Muslims. The Cinnamon Gardens church has a large social service centre, which has free English and mathematics classes for neighbourhood children, a street children project and hospital visitation to the large hospital opposite and a cafe that serves cheap meals (which we enjoyed) and makes a small profit. We also worshipped at the Kollupitiya Baptist Church.

—Geoff Alves



Some of the seventy-two new houses at Ampegama



English class at Cinnamon Gardens



St Michael's and All Angels Polwatte



Duleep de Chickera

Building unity

AMCU broadens the circle by welcoming Evangelicals

Building unity in the midst of diversity is the problem that the church has struggled with throughout history. Christian faith speaks about diversity as a "given" by God. So we need to respect and make use of it in the building and witnessing of the church. But tragically, this does not happen so easily. I think this is what prompted Jesus to pray for the unity of his disciples and all believers. Jesus knew that unity cannot happen through human efforts only. Rather we need to draw closer to God, the source of unity of the church, and to rely on God for wisdom and strength, that we may be empowered in our striving for unity." This was the gist of the Bible study led by the Rev. Dr Margaretha M. Hendriks-Ririmase, moderator of the World Council of Churches, at the opening of the fourth seminar of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU).

AMCU is a symbol of the covenant between the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences

(FABC) to work together towards more visible unity. However, the fourth AMCU seminar held on 11-14 June 2007 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre in Kuala Lumpur also welcomed representatives from Evangelical and Pentecostal churches through the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA).

The decision to invite EFA to AMCU IV came about at the 21-23 September 2006 meeting in Bangkok of the Global Christian Forum in Asia attended by representatives from CCA, FABC and EFA. The theme of AMCU IV, 'Our Common Witness in Contemporary Asia' in fact echoes the theme of the GCF in Asia, 'Affirming Our One Savior in Common Witness' while asserting the need for our faith to address Asian realities today.

The components of the seminar included sharing of faith journeys (in the tradition of Pentecostal sharing of testimonies), Bible studies, and worship led daily by each organisation, inputs by representatives of the three organisations



Group at AMCU plenary in Kuala Lumpur

on 'Living Our Faith in Asia's Social Context' and 'Common Witness in the Context of Religious Plurality in Asia'.

From CCA, Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmase of Indonesia led a Bible study; Sherman Kuek of Malaysia gave an input on 'Living Our Faith in Asia's Social Context' while CCA's Associate General Secretary Rienzie Perera gave an input on 'Common Witness in the Context of Religious Plurality in Asia'.

From FABC, Bishop John Hsane Hgyi from Myanmar led a Bible study while Fr. Francis Xavier D'Sa from India gave an input on common witness.

From EFA, Kiyoshi Tony Gushiken from Japan led a Bible study while Richard Howell gave the two inputs. While only two EFA representatives were present at the seminar, Richard Howell, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, asked, 'Please bear with us and keep the door open.' They asked to be informed of our programs and activities. They also welcomed the possibility of reciprocal invitation to each other's general or plenary assemblies and programs.

The group came up with a statement on the last day of the meeting (available on www.cca.org.hk), which cites some challenges and possible steps to continue the journey of making visible our unity in Christ. While differences in our doctrines and theological perspectives will remain, the participants felt that we must continue to journey together.

In this fourth seminar, the focus on common witness in our sociopolitical and religiously plural context highlighted the need for all Christian churches to work together to denounce all forms of discrimination and to uplift human dignity according to the way of Christ. However, Thirumeni Yakob Mar Iranios of the Orthodox Church pointed out that we also need the time and venue to understand each other's doctrines, traditions and practices.

Concern for the ecumenical formation of Christian youth figured prominently in the discussions. So was the making of parish communities and pastors as focal points for deeper involvement in the search for full visible Christian unity. Mutual cooperation and activities at national and local levels are also to be strongly encouraged.

—Hope S. Antone

Christian faith speaks about diversity as a "given" by God.



L-R: Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, making his presentation; Kiyoshi Tony Gushiken, general secretary of the Japan Evangelical Association; and Tom Michel from FABC.

Real life issues

How does a church address the needs and challenges of young people?

One of the greatest threats facing young people in Asia today is from reproductive health problems.

The church is often slow to speak and act on topics related to the sexual and reproductive health behaviour of youth. Growing up in an urban church setting and as an active member at Sunday school and youth fellowship in South India, I can hardly recall any time when topics related to youth sexuality were discussed openly. They were not part of the curriculum at Sunday school nor were they included as topics for discussion at our weekly youth fellowship meetings. Instead, I discussed these topics with my peer group at church, high school or college. Each of us openly shared our experiences, fears, doubts and challenges with one another. We felt comfortable talking with each other and most of all felt accepted by one another.

Challenges of growing up

As a transitional stage of human development, adolescence involves biological, social, and psychological changes, though the biological ones are easiest to measure objectively. This change is very fast and hard to keep up with. Yet the adolescent has to deal with every single one of these changes, all at the same time.

In this crucial stage of life, it is very important that all adolescents have the right to the information and services necessary to make responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health.

One of the greatest threats facing young people in Asia today is from reproductive health problems. These include pregnancy, abortion, stress and HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. This, combined with the larger contexts of poverty, lack of educational opportunities and unemployment, can cause vulnerable young people to lose hope about their future, lose self-esteem, become frustrated and participate in activities that may not be best for them, including unprotected casual sex. Sexual vulnerability is emerging as a major issue that jeopardizes young people's health.

Unmet needs of young people

Adolescents have crucial needs that have an overbearing influence on their sexual and reproductive health practices.

Five key crucial needs of adolescents are:

Sexual and reproductive health information, education and communication

Family life and reproductive health counseling services for adolescents and parents

Support for sustainable livelihoods for adolescents

A more enabling and supportive community environment

Improved access to quality health services

The church's response to real life issues of youth

How does the church address adolescents' unmet needs and promote positive sexual and reproductive health behaviours?

The church has a definite role to play when youth navigate through adolescence and face the reality of youth sexuality in their everyday lives. While attending to their immediate needs, efforts must be made to take the lead in putting the reality of youth sexuality into public consciousness and into the political agenda.

According to UNFPA reports, of the over 1 billion youth (ages 15 – 24) worldwide, some 10 million are living with HIV. Every day an estimated 6000 youth are infected with the virus. Half of all new infections have occurred among youth. Today, churches are being obliged to acknowledge that we have contributed both actively and passively to the spread of the virus. Our difficulty in addressing issues of sex and sexuality has often made it painful for us to engage, in any honest and realistic way, with issues of sex education and HIV prevention. The consequences are that the entertainment industry and various websites are flooding the world with information that has negatively impacted on the lives of our young people. We must therefore overcome our barriers and break the silence created by discomfort and tradition.

CCA-UNESCAP project – Strengthening life skills for positive youth health behaviour in Pasay City, the Philippines

An important observation made by our National Counterpart Organization (NCO) - the Cooperative Development Office, Pasay City Government - during peer education trainings is that Filipino Out-of-School Youth (OSYs) need an integrated program to strengthen their life skills to say 'NO' to all forms of risky behaviours. They respond more easily and with enthusiasm to offers and prospects for livelihood skills training and employment or job placements.

Under the banner of the MEET@Youth (Mitigating the Effects of External Threats among the Youth of Pasay), the HOPES program has now been initiated.

Important elements of HIV and AIDS prevention through life skills training are:

- Life skills training strengthens the youth's ability to say NO to a risky lifestyle
- Out-of-School Youth (OSYs) can have options to a new beginning of life transformation
- Encourage youth to be involved in an association (Youth organization, church youth fellowship, bayanihan centres) for moral support and accountability.
- OSYs can become Peer Educators who will influence others towards a positive youth health behaviour

While highlighting on the high costs of promiscuity and dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, young people should be made aware that from a biblical point of view, sex is an experience reserved for marriage.

Considering that the church is grounded in the community, there is much that we can offer. We can make a real difference in reducing risky behavior and building positive sexual and reproductive youth health behaviour and therefore combat HIV and AIDS.

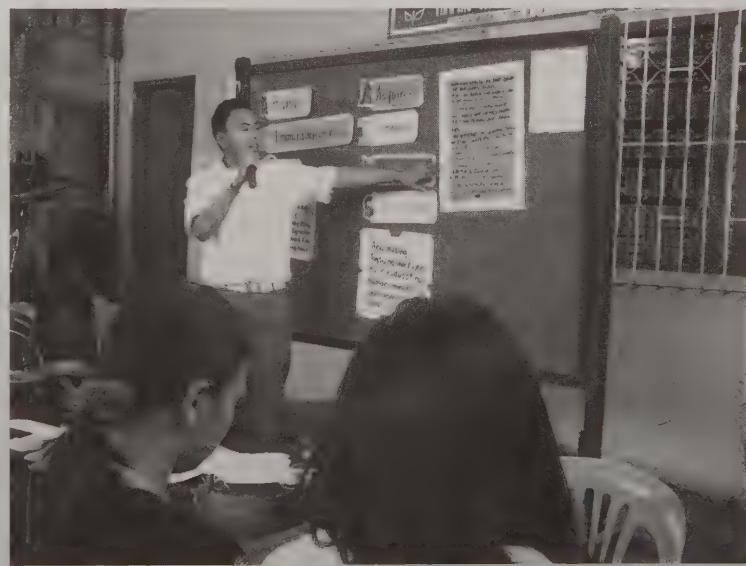
Churches can use the media too - television, radio and reading materials. Youth fellowships, Sunday schools and building teams of youth leaders can be important sources of reproductive health information.

We can also find people and resources that address, from a values context, issues youth face, such as the misuse of tobacco, alcohol and harmful substances, sexuality, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, depression, peer influence etc to build the capacity of youth as well as their parents.

Life-skills-based education and providing youth-friendly health services deserve attention. Community-based peer education programmes would be more effective for targeting a larger segment of youth in the communities. Positive peer influence and the community approach which engages parents, teachers, health workers, village leaders and religious leaders can foster positive health behaviour among young people.

All these efforts must be central to the church's mission. The faith that we seek to promote must inform the daily lives of the youth and give them a new dimension so that it can grow and deepen. If we desire to see young people's involvement in the church and its activities, it is extremely important that the church deals with the "real life issues" of youth.

—Shirley Susan



Life-skills trainer explaining HIV and AIDS among out-of-school youth

The hostage crisis

The kidnapping of South Korean Christian aid workers and the churches response

Sam Kobia prayed that the world would become one 'where human beings can express support of other human beings, without our acts of charity being viewed with suspicion'.

Seoul became the centre of attraction recently when twenty-three Christian aid workers were held and made hostage by the Taliban on 19 July 2007. The workers comprised eighteen women and five men who were travelling in a bus from Kandhar to Kabul in the Ghazni province of Afghanistan. After a few days two male members of the team were killed, including 42-year-old Hyun-kyu, leader of the group, and 29-year-old Sung Min Shim, a youth pastor from Sammul Church. After the Korean negotiators held direct talks with the Taliban captors the remaining hostages were freed to return to Seoul including two women in frail health. The event is considered to be the largest abduction of a group of foreigners in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

Churches reaction

Churches throughout the world condemned the abduction of the hostages and appealed for their immediate release. Many church leaders, along with leaders of other faiths, initiated prayers and supported and consoled the families of the hostages in their time of sorrow and fear.

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia met briefly with the families of the Korean hostages at Sammul Presbyterian Church in Bundang in South Korea to offer comfort and prayers for the hostages' safe return. Kobia was accompanied by the Rev. Kwon Oh-sung, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, and Jung Hae-sung, a member of the WCC executive committee and central committee.

When speaking to the press Kobia said, 'I told them they have now become part of a bigger family, and they can feel they now have a global family holding them up in prayer.'

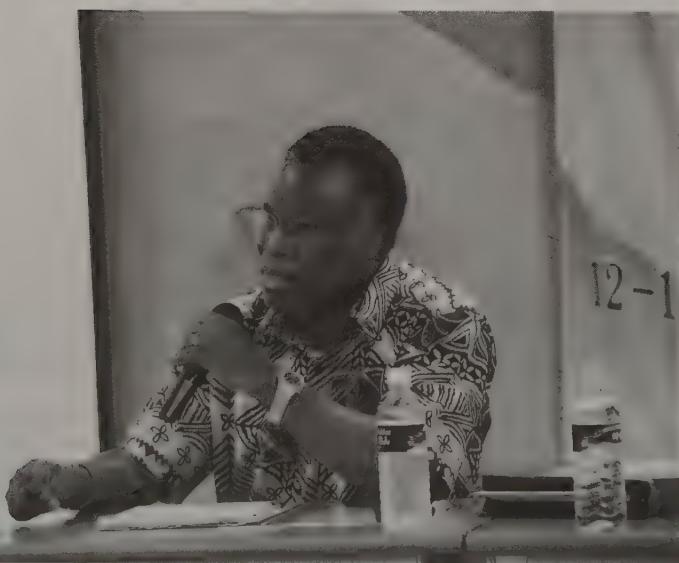
He expressed hope that the world would become one 'where human beings can express support of other human beings, without our acts of charity being viewed with suspicion'.

Speaking for the Southern California Conference of African Methodist Episcopal churches, Rev. Clyde W. Oden Jr said, 'It is our prayer that by our standing together, we can represent the kind of example that the world needs to see and emulate.'

In a joint press conference, the Korea Conference on Religion and Peace (KCRP), the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) said, 'The abductees are civilians who have taken part in volunteer work and they don't have any political antipathy against the people or government of Afghanistan.'

Adding to the church voices condemning the kidnapping, Pope Benedict XVI said, 'It is a grave violation of human dignity that is in contrast with every elementary norm of civility and law and gravely offends divine law.'

Ministers from forty-ninth Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in their meeting in Manila also called for an immediate release of the remaining South Korean hostages. They condemned the killings of innocent lives and expressed condolence to the friends and families of the slain hostages and the Korean people.



Sam Kobia

CCA issued a statement condemning the kidnappings and the general secretary Dr Prawate Khid-arn, urged its member churches, councils and ecumenical organisations worldwide to continue praying for the hostage's release and for a peaceful resolution to the situation.

The interreligious response

On 17 August 2007 a strong show of solidarity was seen from the leaders of different faiths who came together in Los Angeles' Koreatown to urge the release of the South Korean Christian aid workers. In a message directed at the international community, twenty-five representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Islamic groups said 'hostage-taking violates tenets of all religions'.

'There is no religion that condones this inhumane crime,' Rabbi Stephen Julius Stein, of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, said in a news conference at the Islamic Centre of Southern California in Koreatown.

Church mission questioned

Christians in Korea make a quarter of the entire population. Since the 1900s, the Korean church has sent more than 14,000 Christian workers to countries around the world. In recent years,

South Korea has become second only to the United States as a mission-sending country. The Korean Foreign Mission Board, for example, has 580 workers in forty-eight countries. Given this situation the kidnappings sparked a sharp debate among the Christian community, among churches and the people of Korea about the rights and wrongs of Christian charity workers going to danger zones like Afghanistan. There had also been questions put to the Saemmul church as to why the workers were sent to the country despite the government's warnings.

Responding to these questions, Bang Young-kyun, Saemmul church minister said, 'We are very sorry for the whole nation to be in this situation, but some of the criticisms have been too harsh and unfair.'

The South Korean government and Saemmul Presbyterian Church emphasised that all nurses, teachers and homemakers who went to Afghanistan aimed to provide aid at hospitals and schools, with no intention to spread Christianity.

—Naveen Qayyum

The kidnappings sparked a sharp debate among the Christian community in Korea about the rights and wrongs of Christian charity workers going to danger zones like Afghanistan.



Sam Kobia at the theological consultation in Korea

Agreement on evangelisation

Christian code of conduct on religious conversion wins broader backing

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is ready to join the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican in supporting a code of conduct to guide activities seeking converts to Christianity.

The WEA general secretary Rev. Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe 'gave his full approval' to the organization's involvement in the process so far sponsored by the WCC and the Vatican, said Rev. Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, head of the organization's International Institute for Religious Freedom. The WEA is an association of organizations and churches with a membership of some 420 million Christians worldwide.



Some of the participants at the Toulouse consultation (from left to right): Bishop Geevarghese Mar Coorilos (Orthodox, India), Rev. Dr Thomas Schirrmacher (Evangelical, Germany), Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri (Protestant, Malaysia), Rev. Dr Tony Richie (Pentecostal, USA), Mgr. Augustine Shao (Roman Catholic, Zanzibar), Mgr. Robert Le Gall (Roman Catholic, France). © Juan Michel / WCC

Schirrmacher was one of the speakers at an 8-12 August consultation held in Toulouse, France, where some 30 Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians and church leaders from Europe, Asia, Africa and the United States, gathered to outline the content of the code of conduct, which is expected to be finalized by 2010.

In opening the consultation, the archbishop of Toulouse Mgr. Robert Le Gall, a Benedictine monk experienced in interreligious dialogue, said he envisioned the code of conduct as a tool to ensure the 'mutual respect of those who are engaged in a religion' while at the same time preserving the 'right to spread and explain one's faith'.

For Rev. Dr Tony Richie from the Church of God, a Pentecostal US-based denomination, the code of conduct is not about 'whether' Christians evangelize, but 'how' they do it. He advocated a 'dialogical evangelism,' ecumenically oriented and marked by an ethical approach.

The general secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia and co-moderator of the WCC's Faith and Order commission, Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri, proposed that the fundamental ethos of the code of conduct be an attitude of respect for the right of the faithful of any religion to their beliefs. 'Religious preachers need to be told that no religion has a monopoly on the truth, that there are many ways to find salvation.'

According to WEA executive council member John Langlois, the code of conduct should express 'repentance for past wrongdoings so as to make clear that the superiority mentality in regard to other religions has been overcome.'

Taking shape

Among the issues identified by the participants as elements upon which the code of conduct should be based are: common understandings of conversion, witness, mission and evangelism, and concern for human dignity; a distinction between aggressive proselytizing and evangelism; the balance between the mandate to evangelize and the right to choose one's religion.

'Although these are very preliminary findings, the fact that representatives from all these walks of Christian life have been able to meet and discuss such a complex issue, starting to build a consensus, is in itself a success,' said Rev. Dr Hans Ucko, WCC's programme executive for interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

The complexity of the issue was highlighted at the consultation by contributions reflecting very diverse experiences in different contexts: from living as a Christian minority in India, to preaching the gospel to Turks in Austria, to having to turn down people asking for baptism in Zanzibar; from being a Lutheran missionary to Muslim Nigeria, to being an Anglican priest in a British city where Hindus have bought and worship in a former Christian church, or to being a US Pentecostal struggling with the fact that Pentecostals 'are indeed ecumenical but just don't know it.'

The code of conduct should on the one hand establish what all the partners agree needs to be banned when it comes to Christian mission, a daunting task given the many different contexts involved. On the other hand, it should hopefully provide guidelines as to how to deal with complicated issues, like interreligious marriages.

Its promoters expect the code of conduct to fulfil several goals: be an advocacy tool in discussions with governments considering anti-conversion laws, to help to advance the cause of religious freedom, address other religions' concerns about Christian proselytism and inspire them to consider their own codes of conduct, and also help to ease intra-Christian tensions.

None of the partners involved intend - nor have the means - to impose the code of conduct on their constituencies, but they all trust that it will be able to 'impact hearts and minds' and allow for 'moral and peer pressure.'

The next step in this study project jointly undertaken by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the WCC's programme on inter-religious dialogue will be a meeting in 2008 in which the code of conduct will be drafted, building upon the findings of the Toulouse consultation. Launched in May 2006 in Lariano/Velletri, near Rome, the project bears the name: 'An interreligious reflection on conversion: From controversy to a shared code of conduct'.

-WCC

Mission and witness

Calling for better and stronger relationships

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' (Jeremiah 29: 5-7).

However important is 'what the Bible says' in its contexts may be, we need to move beyond what is explicitly and even implicitly stated in the Bible in order to receive the Word of God in our contexts.

Naaman

We need to learn from Naaman (2 Kings 5: 15-19). His healing leads him to embrace the Israelite faith. Naaman says: '...here is no God in all the earth except in Israel

[Y]our servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord.' Then he faces two problems. First, he understands the God of Elisha and his God as a god confined to Israel. So he wants to have two mule-loads of earth in order that he may take it to Syria and thereby have the presence of the God of Israel in Syria. Second, his new faith makes him somewhat miserable and vulnerable because he is required by his profession to accompany his master for worship in the house of Rimmon. He says: 'But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and bows down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count.' It is encouraging to note that these two problems of Naaman are not at all problems for God. In the context of religious pluralism in Asia, God invites us to God's seat of grace; God does not call us to the judgement seat.

Jesus promise

Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth gives us a direction. He says: 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth' (John 16:13). 'Into all truth' need not be the correct translation because the original Greek text suggests two possible alternatives, namely 'into all truth' and 'toward all truth'. We Christians prefer 'into all truth' because we assert that the Spirit deepens and strengthens the Christian understanding of truth already given in Jesus Christ. However, the best translation is 'toward all truth'. This means that there is still more to come. That is, the Spirit will not only strengthen us in the truth already given in Jesus Christ but also will lead us to new truths. The wider community of the Spirit is not limited to the church. Jesus' words that 'people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the

Kingdom of God' (Luke. 13:29) invites us to move forward toward all truth and new truths. The kingship or reign of God is indeed Relationships Unlimited of known and unknown people.

Community Health Service Team

Let me share with you an experience that the Community Health Service Team of the Church of South India Hospital, Bangalore (India) had in the 1970's. Once a very sick Hindu was handed over to the Community Health Service Team. Nobody thought that he would recover or survive. But he recovered. While at the Hospital, he never entered into the Hospital Chapel. But he used to stand near the Chapel whenever they had services. Since he regained his health and strength, the Community Health Service Team (CHST) took him back to his place. Seeing him alive was a great miracle for his people. He soon realized that his people became fanatic and were divided into two groups, each trying to kill and eradicate the other. He intervenes and tells them of his experience at the Hospital. He shares with them the teaching of Jesus as he understood by listening to the songs, the Bible passages, and the sermons, standing near the Hospital Chapel. He pleads with them not to kill anybody. He reiterates this as the main teaching of Jesus.

Because of his efforts, the people give up fighting. They no longer chase the people of the other group to attack and kill them. They decide to build a chapel for Jesus who has brought in such a transformation and quality of life. They decide to have a pooja at the Chapel to mark the dedication of the chapel and their reconciliation. They invite the Community Health Service Team members as witnesses of their reconciliation pooja and the Chapel dedication service.

The Community Health Service Team attends the pooja with joy and satisfaction. A Chapel for Jesus! But there are no Christians! Even the first service held at the Chapel was not a Christian worship! But only those who attended the service as witnesses of the reconciliation of the people were Christians! We may be tempted to describe this as syncretism. But 'relationships unlimited' knows no syncretism.

Nanak

Fourth, let me draw our attention to a lesson to be learned from the mission of Sikhism's founder Nanak. An event that happened in his life illustrates the meaning and the implications of relationships unlimited. Nanak was on his way to Multan (now part of Pakistan). The leaders of the different religions in Multan planned to block his entry into Multan because they thought that Multan did not need him. After all, Multan had enough and more religions! In order that they could make him know their mind they sent to him a bowl of milk when he was about to enter Multan. The bowl was so full that no more milk could be added. The leaders thus asserted that there was no place whatsoever in Multan for Nanak. Realising their motive, Nanak placed a jasmine in the bowl full of milk, and sent it back to the senders. In and through

this gesture, Nanak pointed out that his visit was only to add fragrance to their life, and not to disturb their communal harmony. The greatest question that each of us in Asia and elsewhere must ask ourselves is, how far does my faith inspire and empower me to best cooperate with the followers of other religions and ideologies for concretising relationships unlimited?

Anwar Sadat

After the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981 Egyptian television conducted a series of discussions on whether or not Islam permits the killing of non-believers. On one such occasion one Sheikh argued that Islam denounces non-believers and permits their killing. A young Imam then responded,

'As I read the Qur'an, killing is not only despicable, but totally anti-religious. Dialogue is the way to relate to non-believers. But let me tell you a story which appears in the commentary to the Qur'an.'

As you know our patriarch Abraham, who was also the father of the other two monotheistic faiths, was always happy when he had a guest for his Monday meal. One day he was sitting in his tent; suddenly, he discerned a wayfarer approaching him. He ran to him and invited him to dine. The old man readily accepted the invitation.

While they were washing their feet, Abraham said: 'But there is one condition to our eating together. After the meal we will pray together to the one God and thank him for his bounty.' The man answered, 'I cannot do that. I have been praying to idols for sixty years. Just for one meal I cannot give up my faith.' Abraham grew angry, but the man remained stubborn, and after a short argument he got up and left. Suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared and said: 'Abraham, Abraham, you truly have sinned.' 'Why?' asked the patriarch. 'Because God has been feeding that pagan for sixty years, and He has patience with him and with his lack of faith. And you cannot feed him one meal without demanding that he convert.'

Without going any further into the narration of the young Imam, let us focus on the divine patience. No doctrine of inclusivism and exclusivism can do justice to the divine patience. This is God's grace. An experience or a recognition of the divine patience or God's grace calls us to make a humble affirmation of pluralism. God is a rich 'pluriformity'. God invites us to take side with God's mission of concretising Relationships Unlimited. Let us witness to the fact that God is magnanimous and not miserly. God is gracious! To God be the glory! Amen.

—Rev. Dr Chellaian Lawrence

This excerpt is taken from Rev. Dr Chellaian Lawrence's paper on 'Mission and Witness: Invitation to Relationships Unlimited' presented at the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the Christian Conference of Asia on March 05, 2007, in Parapat, Indonesia. Rev. Dr Chellaian Lawrence is on the Faculty of the Theological College of Lanka, Pilimatalawa, Sri Lanka, as Dean undergraduate studies.

Common Prayer of the North and South for Peace and Unification

August 15, 2007

God of righteousness and peace,

We thank you for having listened to our nation's mourning in pain under the Japanese occupation, and for opening the door of unification and peace on the Korean peninsula sixty-two years ago.

We thank you for calling the churches in the North and the South to be disciples of Christ and to gather together to pray in one voice for peace and unification on this Liberation Memorial Day.

God of love and unification,

We pray that you lead us to do our best to create a new history of unification beyond division, and lead our people to help each other to move beyond the suffering of war and to achieve common prosperity.

We pray that you give us a new sign of reconciliation and cooperation on the Korean peninsula to which you call us, which will contribute to peace in North-East Asia and all the world.

God who gives us strength and wisdom,

You showed us that peace is to be achieved through humility and service just as Jesus came to us in a humble manger, in communion with sinners and washing the feet of the disciples.

You taught us, through your death on the cross offering a sacrifice for atonement, that unification and unity is to be fulfilled through self-sacrifice.

We will follow your teachings through our oneness in prayer as churches in the North and the South.

We will do our utmost to be a church proclaiming national unification and peace as well as practicing it

with mildness and humility, not with threats,

with justice and love, not with force,

with patience and devotion, not with oppression.

God, we pray that you fill us with strength and wisdom.

Believing that you call us to be workers for our nation's unification and peace, that you call us to work today and continuously, and that you guide us to open a new history of our nation's unification and peace, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

This Common Prayer was jointly written by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) and the Korean Christian Federation (KCF).

Six countries' churches as watchdog for Six Party Talks

A proposal for a parallel meeting of churches from nations involved in the Six Party Talks on the Korean peninsula was endorsed by a broad range of churches over the weekend at a conference in Seoul celebrating the centenary of the Korean Great Revival of 1907 and exploring the churches' role in bringing peace to the divided nation.

The proposal, which was submitted in a keynote address to the conference by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), recommended churches in the U.S., Russia, China, Japan and the two Koreas to 'persuade their respective governments to ensure the continuity of these talks to diffuse tension and conflict in the peninsula so that people can live together in peace.'

In order to do this, Kobia suggested the churches from the six nations 'explore possibilities of organizing a parallel forum of churches' including churches in Canada, Scandinavia and the European Union at the next round of Six Party Talks. The forum would act as a 'watchdog' of the talks.

The Six Party Talks began in 2003 after North Korea had withdrawn from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The talks have remained stalemated until recently when North Korea agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities.

The statement from the Korean churches asked the WCC to facilitate the parallel meeting of churches and asked for churches around the world to 'recognize that peace and unification in the Korean peninsula is a regional issue with global implications.'

The statement also called on the governments of North and South Korea and all participants in the upcoming summit set for August 29-30 to establish plans for economic development and invigorate exchanges between both states at all levels of both societies.

The proposal endorsed at the conference called on the Korean churches to pray for each other and work on articulating a clear understanding of unification on the peninsula while deepening relationships with one another.

The Korean churches represented at the weekend conference included those belonging to the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Christian Council of Korea. More than 300 participants from Korea and 27 countries in Asia and the rest of the world attended the event.

-WCC

Addressing global warming

CCA, along with the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the YMCA, environmental-based NGOs, governmental organisations, churches and educational institutions from the northern region of Thailand organised a workshop titled 'Stop Global Warming—our responsibilities'. The event was held on 4–5 June 2007 at the YMCA in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The participants from diverse backgrounds addressed the issue of global warming in their contexts and emphasised the importance of resolving this grave environmental, social and economic threat to the planet. They discussed the issue of rising sea levels expected to flood the coastal areas and heavily populated megadelta regions in Southeast Asia. One of the highlights in the discussions of the workshop was the report of UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UN-IPCC), which met in Brussels early this year and stated that Asia will face drastic flooding, water shortages, hunger risks and disease problems over the current century at the present rate of global warming.

The workshop ended with a statement laying out recommendations for action at individual, community and government level. The environmental network 'Global Warming Watch' was initiated to follow up with the recommendations.

ECHO Conference

An international conference was organised on the issue of agriculture and rural community development by Educational Concerns for Hunger Organisation (ECHO). ECHO is a church-based and non-profit organisation in the USA working for the development issues by providing education through advocacy and networking. The conference took place on 11–14 June 2007 in Chiang Mai and more than a hundred participants working in the field of sustainable agriculture and rural community development from Asia, America and Europe participated in the discussions.

During the reflections CCA general secretary Prawate Khid-arn said, 'Poverty exists everywhere. It is unacceptable in a world so rich

in resources and brilliant minds that poverty still plagues so many people. Countries have had to take a cutback in the areas of health, education and vital services for repayment of loans imposed by the international financial institutions over the last several decades.' He further emphasised that 'we need people-centered development, a development that talks about freedom and empowerment of the poor in decision-making. People's power has to be a vital part of change.'

Asia Pacific Forum meeting

The Asia-Pacific Forum (APF) meeting was held 13–14 June 2007 at the Anglican Church in Toronto, Canada. Seventeen members representing ecumenical organisations and churches in Asia and the Pacific participated in the meeting. This included Church World Service (CWS), General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), United Church of Christ (UCC), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), KAIROS and the Baptist Church in the USA.

CCA general secretary Prawate Khid-arn was invited to the meeting where he shared on vision, mission and goals for 2005–2010 on 'Building Communities of Peace for All-An Ethical Response'.

He said that, 'Building communities of peace for all is a time-honored target of CCA for addressing peace and conflict issues from holistic dimensions whilst promoting people's participation and sustainability.'

He also emphasised that the participation in the struggles of people and commitment to religion are the two sides of the same coin. Through knowledge sharing, education and interfaith initiatives a larger community with a model for managing peaceful negotiations reaching boundaries beyond communities can be attained.

Given the current context of peace building in the region, the forum agreed to take on the issue of peace in Sri Lanka as a main agenda for its Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) in March 2008. It was also decided to have another APF meeting in Asia in conjunction with CCA General Committee Meeting next year.

APF is a forum of ecumenical organisations and churches from USA and Canada working in

Asia and the Pacific. The members of the forum meet twice a year to exchange and share on common concerns and programs implemented. They also avail the opportunity to enhance relationships and cooperation with ecumenical bodies and churches in the region.

Let it shine!

The 26th General Synod and the 50th anniversary celebration of the United Church of Christ in USA with a theme "Let it Shine" was held at the Civic Centre in Hartford, Connecticut on 22–26 June, 2007. Over 8,000 people, including delegates, observers, volunteers and special guests from ecumenical partners were present at the event.

The Asian partners, including CCA general secretary Prawate Khid-arn and Dr K.B Rokaya of NCC Nepal were invited and shown appreciation and affirmation for their ecumenical services.

The meeting was originally planned to be held at the new Connecticut Convention Centre and the Marriot Hotel. However due to a major labour dispute the venue was changed to an outdoor stadium Civic Centre. This showed the firm political stance by UCC for a justice cause.

The scripture in the opening message from Rev. Davita McAllister, taken from Matthew (4:12-22) was very powerful. She challenged congregations on the issue of youth development and participation in God's mission. She emphasised the importance of these issues in the midst of challenges in USA. 'The light has dawned, and it is our time to let it [the Gospel] shine' she said.

A message from Barack Obama a Democratic presidential nominee and member of the Chicago's Trinity UCC was another highlight of the General Synod. He said, 'It is time for America to change. Over a million American people are living in poverty and dealing with issues such as unemployment, HIV/AIDS, abortion, gay and same-sex marriages, war and conflicts. All these issues are challenging the churches and communities of faith to be visible for peace and justice in America and the world over.'

He further added that, 'People are hungry for change, and we are all connected. We have to play our part to change the world'. America has to dig out its 'cynical' approach to problem-solving. And somehow, somewhere along the way, faith is stopped from bringing us together and

has started getting used to drive us apart.'

Obama concluded by saying that 'it is a matter of our [religious] consciousness. The church might even be small, but we can change the world and make another world possible.'

The General Synod issued a number of resolutions. The resolution on war in Iraq and the extra-judicial killing in the Philippines was approved among the others. UCC also invited member churches and ecumenical organisations to its '100,000 signatory campaign' to stop war in Iraq.

During the celebration ninety-three exhibition venues presented various programs and institutions of the UCC. Over fifty thematic workshops were organized around the venue. In public parks, music and other various outdoor activities were arranged for people. More details of the event are available on UCC website www.ucc.org.

Metropolitan Mar Iranaeus honoured

Metropolitan Joseph Mar Iranaeus, a former president of the Christian Conference of Asia, had been conferred the Honoris Causa (Degree of Doctorate in Divinity) by the Senate of Serampore College (University). The institution is one of the most prestigious ecumenical institutions established in Asia since 1818. It is known for rendering meritorious contributions to the church and society through pastoral, ecclesial, ecumenical and social contributions.

Mar Iranaeus comes from the historic Palakunnathu family which had provided a number of leaders to the churches including the historic Malankara Mar Thoma Church founded by St. Thomas in 52 AD. He completed his theological studies at the United Theological College, Bangalore, Protestant Episcopal Seminary, Virginia, USA and the University of Oxford.

From the early years of his service as an ordained minister of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India, Mar Iranaeus contributed much to the life and witness of Indian and Asian churches and the ecumenical movement. He became a bishop in 1975 and served the oikumene with distinction. He was President of the Kerala Council of Churches, President of the National Council



of Churches of India (NCCI), President of the Churches Auxiliary of Social Action (CASA). He currently serves as the senior Sufragan Metropolitan.

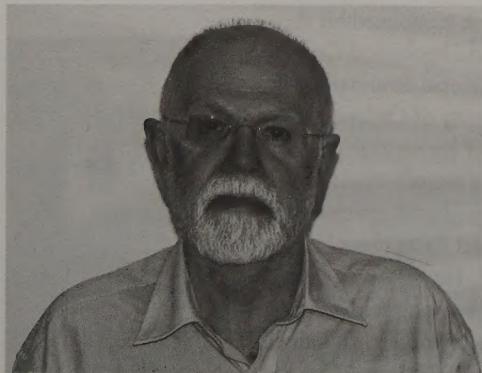
CCA congratulates Metropolitan Mar Iraenaeus its former president and shares the joy of conferring the doctorate degree to him by the Senate of Serampore.

CCA News Editor retiring

After almost a decade Geoff Alves is retiring as editor of CCA News, completing a career in publishing of more than thirty years. Ten years ago when Geoff was visiting Hong Kong he called in on CCA to visit staff members and friends alike Glynthea Finger, and found CCA News was running seven months late. He immediately volunteered to produce the magazine, and the first of his thirty-eight issues appeared in 1998.

Geoff began his working life as a teacher, but after thirteen years in the classroom in rural Victoria in Australia and in Melbourne he transferred to the Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria, and was editor of the Education Gazette for fifteen years. When the Publications Branch was disbanded, he became assistant editor of The Australian Christian, the magazine of Churches of Christ in Australia, where he helped introduce the magazine to the computer. (Publishing is now entirely computerised, including the photographs.) After a number of years as a freelance editor (his last job was a nineteen-volume course of study for schools in Victoria) he was looking forward to retire to his farm when God intervened.

Most of Geoff's work on CCA News was done on a laptop at his home in Canberra, Aus-



tralia's capital, but from time to time he visited CCA in Hong Kong and later Chiang Mai to keep in contact with the organisation.

Highlights of Geoff's association with CCA include two general assemblies, in Tomohon, Indonesia, in 2000, and Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2005, where he produced the daily newspaper. He also attended the World Council of Churches assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, reporting on the involvement of Asian churches. He also helped produce a wide variety of CCA publications, including the two-volume history of the ecumenical movement in Asia, books of the minutes of the general and executive committees, annual reports and numerous pamphlets, booklets and posters.

Geoff has valued the many ecumenical friends he has made while working for CCA, and the opportunity to visit many countries, ecumenical bodies and churches.

On an even more personal note, CCA was responsible for introducing Geoff to Christine Ledger, a former associate general secretary for finance, who is also well known for her work with the World Student Christian Movement and the NCC in Australia. Geoff and Chris married in 1999 and made their home in Canberra. Later this year Geoff and Christine are moving to Edinburgh in Scotland for six months, where Chris is going to pursue her academic interests on the relationship between theology and technology and Geoff is going to attempt to retire yet again.

Sound of Waves – a feminist theological magazine

Sound of Waves is the first feminist theological magazine in Myanmar and has created ripples recently. This is an ecumenical endeavour initiated by faculty, students and feminist theologians of Myanmar Theological Institute. The magazine is in regional language and reaches a large number of people in Myanmar. A former intern of CCA Ms Ye Ma La Wun Shwe Wut from Myanmar is a member of the editorial team. Dr Anna May Saw Pa, former principal of MIT, is the pioneer of this ecumenical feminist initiative.

Calling for all Senior Friends of the World Student Christian Federation

The WSCF is inviting its Senior Friends to a Senior Friends Gathering to be held in Montreal, Canada, from 4 to 8 August 2008. This gathering will be held alongside the WSCF General Assembly and coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the historic WSCF World Student Conference which met in Turku in 1968.

Would you like to receive further information about this event? Would you like to help in its planning? Do you know of others who might like to receive information? Would you like to be on our list to receive further news of WSCF and our senior friends?

If your answer is 'Yes!' to any of these questions, please contact Michael Wallace

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Trade Week of Action

In the recent context of the trade politics resulting into the widening gap between the poor and rich countries of the world, CCA calls all its member churches, national council of churches and ecumenical partner organisations to be actively involved in the upcoming Trade Week of Action taking place on 14–21 October, 2007. CCA asks churches to pray and work for the cause by actively engaging in trade justice issues and challenging the miseries of millions of poor people due to enforced free trade. More ways to be involved and registered can be found at www.tradeweek.org where a guide is also available to be downloaded.

WCC internship programme 2008

The World Council of Churches (WCC) will welcome five young people (aged 18-30 years) to serve as interns in its Geneva offices from February 2008 to January 2009. Interns bring valuable experiences to the WCC while they undertake several modules of ecumenical learning.

Successful candidates are people committed to the ideals of the ecumenical movement, who will bring their energy, commitment and a fresh vision to their specific work assignment. Applicants must send, along with their application, background information about their church or Christian youth network that will help them in implementing their proposed ecumenical project. The closing date for receiving applications for the five internships is 20 September 2007. More information can be found at www.wcc-coe.org.

Apply now: Stewards Programme 2008

Young Christians aged 18 to 30 now have the chance to apply to be one of 25 youth from all over the world in the next WCC stewards programme from 6-22 February 2008. They will participate in the 13-20 February WCC central committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, contributing their work in the areas of worship, conference room, documentation, press office, sound, and other administrative and support tasks.

Being a steward means hard work, but it is also a unique ecumenical experience of togetherness with young people from different churches, countries and cultures.

Applicants are invited to send in the application form until 20 September 2007. More information can be found at www.wcc-coe.org.

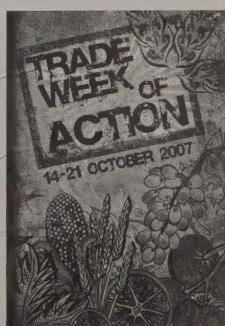
CCA former communication secretary passes away

Godfrey Raymond Karat, a well-known Indian ecumenical leader and a former communication secretary of CCA, passed away in Mysore on 2 September 2007. His funeral took place in Wesley Church in Bangalore, India. CCA received the news from a friend, Philip Mathew.

Karat worked for CCA from 1981 to 1987 in Singapore. Before joining CCA, he was consultant for CCA's Indochina consortium.

He also served as general secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India. Later, he worked in the All India Christian Higher Education in Delhi, and in the Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society in Bangalore as its associate director.

Karat was born in Mangalore, on the west coast of the country. He did his higher studies in English literature at the Madras Christian College, where he taught for many years. He was one of the founders of People's Reporter, a fortnightly paper of current affairs, which he edited for more than ten years. He is survived by his wife and a son and grandchildren.



The People Cry Out

We are
Dalits, Kanaka Maoli,
Hidatsa, Maori,
Koori, Xhosa, Ainu,
Ojibway, Buraku,
Korean-Australians,
Koreans in Japan,
Filipino migrants in Japan.
We speak in tongues
Yet use the oppressor's:
"English-speaking group"
In Workshop 2 on
Ethnicity, Culture,
Education and Identity.
We come from far and near.
The circle comes full:
Truth-telling,
Wound-baring,
Struggle-daring.
We are not guinea pigs.
No,
We are not for display,
For listening to our stories
With an ear for documentation.
Will you pamphletize our tears,
Turn our blood into gold
Or just go home
Feeling lucky you aren't we?
We name our pain,
Endless litany of afflictions:
Bondage,
Suppressed spirit,
Repressed desire,
Violence,
Rape,
Child abuse,
Prostitution,
Drugs, alcohol,

Turning agony inward,
Self-hating,
Self-loathing,
Self-destructing,
Guilt,
Shame,
Being patronized
And appeased,
Pacified,
Silenced.
Knowing Christians
Don't love each other,
Mutilated,
Dismembered,
The pain of no pain
With no knowledge of
Oppressed people's pain,
Ashamed.
Yet as we
Touch our wounds
With reverence,
We proclaim:
We are not bound, trapped
And defined by pain.
We are not victims.
We are more than our pain.
We are bigger than all these.
Our identity is complete,
We are whole.
Re-membered,
We struggle.
We speak,
Knowing that each word
Uttered
Risks more hurt,
Death.
We refuse to suffer.
We resist amnesia.

We challenge our churches
To live out their "respect of
Self-determination,"
Dismantle structures
Of racism
And the system that
Allows oppression
Of women.
We weave dreams
And hope,
Organizing,
Studying, learning,
Training for leadership,
Marching for freedom,
Building coalitions
And networks of
Power,
Not based on equality
With the oppressor majority.
We create new relationships,
Neither dominant nor hierarchical.
In our new Home
Of Faith,
Of the Spirit
Connected,
We claim
Our place in history,
Proud to stand with our
Ancestors,
Foremothers,
Storytellers,
Flowing in us, through us.
We are the
Great River of Memory
The circle comes full
We are.